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AND THE

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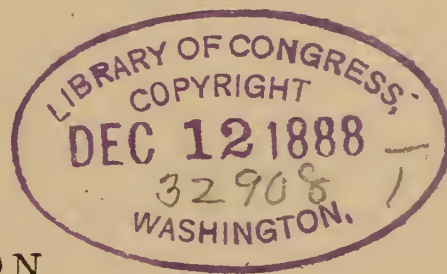
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JESUS
AND THE
MEN ABOUT HIM

BY
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BOSTON
GEO. H. ELLIS, 141 FRANKLIN STREET
1888

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To the men and women everywhere who hope for a church more real, more broad, more noble than any that now exists, this little book is offered, with the purpose of setting forth under the guise of familiar types of character the eternal principles which make religion precious to the heart of man.

PREFACE.

THERE is constant need of object lessons and parables, even for the most thoughtful minds, in enforcing moral truths. From whatever point of view we consider the figures in the New Testament story, they furnish most interesting types to describe precisely such men as we see to-day. Whatever, also, any one thinks of certain dogmatic or historical questions about Jesus, there is practically no name or word so clear or that carries such wealth of meaning as when we tell men of the Christ life and the Christ ideal. The characters presented in the following pages are here used purely for this practical or ideal purpose, as so many pictures or object lessons, to make truth the more simple and beautiful. The author, indeed, has ceased to be very deeply interested in questions of mere historical criticism. Larger and more important subjects demand the thought of the world. Men need to know that a beneficent God manifests himself in human life now no less than when Jesus walked in Galilee. Men need to have preached to them what Paul used to say,—that “as many as are led by the Spirit of God *are* sons of God.” Men’s faithlessness is not concerning the

past or about matters which may never be proved.

— Their most fatal want of faith touches the present. It is whether this world is so truly God's world that it is safe and only safe to do business, to treat neighbors, and to manage the State by the Golden Rule. Men wait to see the real and ever new miracles of faith, hope, and love. Show men these perfectly practicable miracles, already worked in certain divine lives, worked afresh in myriads of lives, and doubt and fear shall flee from the earth. The author profoundly believes in this kind of miracle or manifestation of God. He would be very glad if this little book might help any one else thus to believe; namely, that this world, here and now, is God's world, in which it is therefore well for the man who follows wherever Love bids. The author's thanks are especially due to his friend, Mr. George S. Merriam of Springfield, the author of "A Living Faith," who revised the manuscript, and encouraged him to offer it to the public.

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I.

JOHN THE BAPTIST, THE ASCETIC.

JERUSALEM stands on hills considerably more than two thousand feet above the level of the Mediterranean. The valley of the Dead Sea lies fourteen hundred feet below the Mediterranean. From the gate of Jerusalem to the valley, in fifteen miles, you descend half the height of Mt. Washington. Here, between the gardens and vineyards of Jerusalem and the deep, gloomy valley, was the wilderness of Judea, with bare limestone rocks and caves and haunts of robbers, a forenoon's walk out of the city. Among the valleys of this rough district were occasional little oases, where, about a spring or mountain stream, palm-trees grew. The fertile spots in the valleys were the home of communities or brotherhoods of pious men, called Essenes. There were, perhaps, never more than four thousand of them in the whole country, some of whom lived in the towns. But

their singular example carried a weight of influence beyond their numbers. In a time of wars, when every man was a fighter, they would not be soldiers, or even manufacture arms and weapons. When human slavery was generally practised, they would have no slaves. In a land of vineyards, they would drink no wine. In entering the order, one promised "that he would honor God, practise righteousness toward men, do harm to no man, either of his own accord or at the command of others ; that he would always hate the wicked and assist the righteous ; that he would show fidelity to all men, especially to those in authority ; also, to love the truth and expose liars, to keep his hands and his conscience pure from unlawful gains." Keeping these rules, restraining bodily passions and appetites, bathing their bodies in cold water, devoting a portion of each day, besides hard work, to prayers, psalms, and hymns, partaking of their noon and evening meal together, as a sort of communion service, they believed that the spirit of man was purified and brought close to the mystery of the divine light, that visions and prophetic foresight of things to come might be looked for, or that the art of healing the sick could be learned.

It was in this wilderness of Judea that the remarkable person appeared whom the world knows under the name of "John the Baptist," or, better, "the Baptizer." We are able to distinguish but the bare outline of a heroic figure,— "the voice of one crying in the desert." We know hardly anything of the details of his life. If his father was a priest, John was not the stuff that priests were made of. The precise ceremonial of outward things, the slaughter of sheep and oxen, the looking after the tithes and the offerings, the noisy feasting multitudes, the gorgeous temple, crowded with curiosity seekers, with booths and tables in the great spaces where men bought and sold and quarrelled, the endless routine, doing things as they had always been done, keeping the old religious customs intact which did not make people either holy or happy,—this life of a priest must have revolted many an earnest soul. You may suppose John some day to have met a kinsman from one of the Essenes' villages. "Come with us," the older man says to the younger. "You were not meant by God for a priest, to superintend the butchery of cattle, to wring the tithes from the poor. This town life is a sham. Come with us, then, and try our simple life,—pure air,

clear running water, the fruit of the earth, honey from the bees, with the company of good men, with worship and the intercourse with the Almighty." John was the man to hear such kind of appeal. At any rate, he went to live in the desert where the Essenes were. He doubtless went in and out of their villages, knew their manner of life, and practised their rigid morals.

Why did not John stay with the Essenes and become one of them? The Essenes were pure and harmless people, but they had no mission to be helpers and saviors. On the contrary, they feared to endanger their own purity by mixing with men and going into crowds. You may liken them to the early Puritans who came to this country. They did not want the wicked world to follow them here. They wanted to keep pure by themselves. Their mission was merely to live. They had their own souls to save. They were not here to help others to live; and tho they were humane, strict, and devout, and tho they loved one another within the brotherhood, they had no kindling and missionary love for mankind.

Now, no eager, passionate, large nature could have been content to stay with the Essenes. These Essenes' communities had existed for gen-

erations,—virtuous, serene, religious,—but the world did not seem to be growing any better for them. All that they did was to keep things as they were, being as conservative as the priests in the temple. No reformation came from them. On the contrary, they carried off into the desert the very men needed in towns and cities to build up a more virtuous and religious town life. Suppose John saw this: it was obvious that there was no room for many people to become Essenes, even if that life had been able to satisfy ever one. Besides, the circumstances of the times brought pressing need of more than the Essenes were doing.

John's age was not only the most memorable in history, but, what is rare, men suspected that it was memorable. It was memorable compared with anything that had gone before, for its riches, splendor and luxury, the bustle and din of wide commerce. The boy John had watched the merchants' caravans climbing the hills. He had looked on at the building of palaces and castles. He had most likely seen the great race-course at Jericho, where heathen games were played. He had been shocked at the new theatre within the holy city. He had wondered at the massive mar-

ble buildings of the temple. He had heard as a boy of the great doings and the unlimited expenses of the Herods, who had girdled the land with forts, and built new cities with foreign names, and filled them with foreign people.

The times were memorable, too, for vice and oppression. The terrible Herod the Great had died, perhaps in the year in which John was born. The tales of his grinding taxes, of the murder of his own sons, of men and women spirited away from their homes to his palaces and dungeons, were in every one's mouth. No one knew where his spies and informers were not. The new brood of Herods had come, if possible, smaller and meaner. Over all stood the dreaded power of Rome. Even in the temple halls the eagles of Rome had been suspended. Roman legions were seen from time to time marching up to Jerusalem or across the land to guard the borders of the empire against the Parthians. Unscrupulous Roman governors made themselves rich, and rich provinces poor. Altogether, it seemed as if the world grew worse. Vices and foreign customs spread: it seemed as if people had never suffered more unbearable evils.

Along with all this, there was a wonderful ex-

pectation of coming change. It was not in Judea alone. Men are said to have talked of it in Egypt and at Rome. The present age was hurrying on, men said, to its close. This vague sense of coming change, this prevalent discontent and popular unhappiness, predisposed men to religion. All manner of superstitions were credited. There seems to have been a revival of what we to-day call Spiritualism,—a readiness to believe in apparitions and the manifestations of the supernatural. In Rome there was a strange interest in occult things and Oriental religions. Palestine was full of people supposed to be possessed with demons. Men both feared spirits and were prepared to see them in the dusk of the night, as in the rumor after the crucifixion of Jesus that many spirits of the dead appeared to people in the city. Altogether, there was a strange sensitiveness, uneasiness, and restlessness of the popular mind, ill at ease with the world as it was, in hope and fear of what might soon be,—the fated end of the world or the golden age and the kingdom of God. There had been growing among the Hebrews for centuries a prophetic hope, like what the slaves at the South are said to have had. “Some time yet,” true men had said, “the eternal laws

will vindicate themselves"; as we say to-day even more surely when we add, "That which ought to be must be."

In the midst of these anxieties, rumors, anticipations, dread, the word went up to the capital that a strange man was just out of the city in the wilderness, preaching the kingdom of God. People did not know who he was. They described him by his dress and appearance,—his leathern girdle and camel's hair shirt, with the face and clothing of a hermit, whose meagre fare was whatever came to hand, honey or locusts. People went in crowds to see him. We should have gone if we had been in Jerusalem.

John's word was perfectly simple,— "The kingdom of God is at hand." What possessed him to believe so? Little did he reck of the centuries of blood that have come and gone, from his time till now. Nevertheless, he said what was true. A new faith, a new spirit, a new and higher order of men were about to appear. John only dimly apprehended what he meant when he said, "Lo, the kingdom of God," as the heart of youth in all ages but vaguely knows what it looks forward to.

What sort of sermons did John preach? They were what we call almost strictly moral sermons.

There were soldiers on the march who came to hear him. He did not tell them to stop being soldiers, as the Essenes would have said, but to stop their pillage and be content with their pay. He did not tell men to leave their homes and live in the desert as he did, but, staying where they were, to share their food and their extra garments with those who had none. He did not tell the publicans, as you would have supposed, to give up collecting taxes for Herod, but he bade them to stop extorting more than was due. He broke out, however, in indignation against the money-loving citizens of Jerusalem, the priests and Pharisees, the men of good families, and called them "the breed of vipers." It was because he had no confidence in their sincerity. But he did not bid them to forsake all and follow him, as Jesus bade certain men to do: he only said, "Repent, and show that you have repented by what you do." There was a motive of fear behind this preaching. The new kingdom of God would make short work of the sinners. It was as tho the just king were expected to come suddenly to assume his throne. He would banish and destroy the wicked people out of the land. No one then thought of any other way of disposing of

them. Bad men, hearing such preaching, trembled to think what would happen to them if they were caught in their sins. Altogether, it was healthy preaching, tho without any fine spiritual uplift. It was adapted to a sensual and superstitious people, like the sermons of certain noted revivalists, who make bad, dishonest, greedy people thoroughly frightened. There need be no fear that such people will be frightened too much.

The only form or ceremony which John prescribed or used was baptism. The people were accustomed to frequent ceremonial washings. The Essenes appeared to have baptized themselves religiously every day. John was simpler. He said, almost in so many words, Why baptize yourselves over and over? Be baptized once for all. Be clean, and then stop doing the things that make you unclean. If John had used any words or formula of baptism, it would have been such a formula as this: "I baptize you in token of renouncing your sins, and of the kingdom of God." Here at the Jordan Jesus came to take this baptism. He must have been one of those powerfully moved by the preaching of John. He most likely found his disciples among those who had listened to John. Everywhere, people were

set to thinking and reading the old scriptures. There was a lifting of the moral standards. When Jesus should begin to preach, people would be eager to hear more.

John's preaching, however, left a great blank. After you had repented of your sins, what then? After you had given away your surplus of food and your spare cloak, there would be a reaction. The kingdom of God had not yet come. You merely waited till it should appear. Meantime, life was hard as before; meantime, temptations abounded to do as others did. It was not evidently God's world yet. How could you be content before God's world should come, while it still seemed mostly the devil's world?

John's own character and example illustrated the difficulty. He did not even come into the abodes of men himself, but they had to go out to him. He dressed like a fugitive; he lived an unnatural life. Men admired him, but few could imitate such a life. It was forbidding to most men. Besides, tho strict, noble, and fearless, John lacks warmth and breadth of nature. He seems a man who expects God, not a man who has found God. It is not God's world yet that he lives in, but he waits for God's world to come.

"There is a gospel," he says, but he is not able to tell you what it is. This does not constitute a gospel. Men will soon be tired of hearing it. It will keep John's stern face to the front, but it makes no sunshine in his face. This is the character of the ascetic temperament always. The ascetics tell you how you can contrive to get an exceptional vision of God. They have their ceremonial or their austere manner of life, which, if you will enter upon, will possibly let an occasional sight of God into your soul. But God does not habitually belong in their world. God's light does not naturally shine upon them. You must go out of the world to find God. The real kingdom of God has not yet come; but you may make shift as you can, while you wait for it. As for common people who live ordinary lives and do nothing exceptional, there is no immediate gospel for them in this world. Their gospel is yet to come.

It is some faint survival of this ascetic idea that we still see in the thought that a church is holy ground, apart from the world at large, which does not yet belong to God. In church you may find God exceptionally, as you do not find him elsewhere. It is the same faint survival of the

old asceticism that preserves Lent. Here is a little period when you go out of the world and retire to the desert to hear John preach the doctrine of repentance. You fast and live exceptionally, and you may catch sight of God, who does not yet belong in the whole horizon of your life. The kingdom of God still waits. Whereas the only true gospel that fills a man's soul is that of one who can say: "Lo! the kingdom of God is here. It is within you. This life is God's. Now are ye the sons of God. Live then here and every day, not in Lent alone, not in the desert, but in every place, as the child of God." The ascetic John did not see that. The ascetic spirit never sees it. Therefore, the reformation of John could not live, much less create a religion.

John's end is very pathetic. Close to one of the pools on the Jordan, where John was wont to baptize, they say, rose a palace of the mean and low-lived Herod, John's opposite in character, station, and method of life. He had put away his wife, the daughter of a king, to take the wife of his brother. John called sin by its shortest name. Word was brought the king that this intrepid prophet dared to denounce him in the presence of the populace, with whom already he

was sufficiently unpopular. The king swooped down from his fortress, and bore John away to the frontier castle of Machærus beyond the Dead Sea. Rumor was that even Herod did not dare at first to put John to death, but let his disciples come and go to visit him in prison. It was from here that he sent men to learn of Jesus, "Art thou he that should come?" But the wicked woman could not forgive John for attacking her. Every one remembers the story of the revel in the castle, the graceful dancing girl, and Herod's insane promise, and the executioner despatched to John's solitary cell. Where now was the coming kingdom of God that this faithful man had proclaimed? Where now was the righteous God who ruled the earth? Did the prophet despair, or doubt the fact of righteousness? Did his faith die at last, as the light of this world was cut off? No: that was never the manner of the prophets. They were in the hands of God. Should the soldier despair of his cause, because his turn came to die? No: the Almighty reigned. The kingdom which had not come would yet come to the longing eyes of men.

It is the fashion nowadays to laugh at the folly of the ascetic life. Let those who laugh at it be

sure that they have something nobler. Who now cares for Herod, whom Galilee looked up to and feared? The man who tried to live for himself did the world nothing but harm, whereas the man who lived for God still lives in his pure influence over every soul of Christendom. John's life, which seemed to fail, succeeded. He won a place among the great names of history. He bore a part in bringing in the reign of justice and peace among men. He serves God yet as a pure and brave memory in the souls of men.

II.

NICODEMUS, THE PHARISEE.

THE story is that Jesus had come up to Jerusalem to the Passover feast. In some poor and cheap part of the city, such as the lower class of pilgrims frequented, in a little, bare, upper chamber, you may think of him as receiving occasional guests. Here occurs the perfectly dramatic picture of an interview between the peasant rabbi from Galilee and Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish Sanhedrim, or senate of seventy. The Jewish senator, leaving his spacious house, his face muffled, with perhaps a single slave in attendance, threading the dark, narrow streets, the Passover moon filtering its light from above into the crevices of the city, knocks at last at the humble house, and inquires in low tones for a certain Jesus lodging there. He is shown up into the low room, possibly crowded already with Jesus' poor countrymen and disciples. There

this Pharisee of rank stands in his fine robes and broad phylacteries, with inquisitive, intellectual face, to study the strange new prophet, whose truth-loving eyes in turn penetrate his visitor and read his character. A cheap lamp, such as they furnish in lodging-houses, burns dimly as these two representative men talk together into the night; and the disciples, tired of hearing, fall asleep, stretched on the floor. So much for the picture.

The Pharisees, to whom Nicodemus belonged, were the religious leaders of the time, as their name probably suggests. They were the Puritans among the Hebrews. They aimed to maintain and teach the holy law. They even went beyond the law, holding that there was a considerable body of teaching that had come down by tradition from Moses. This traditional law partly explained and partly re-enforced the written laws. You may roughly liken it to the English common law, which grows out of and depends upon the rulings of the courts. So the Pharisees counted as sacred whatever they had inherited from an older time, till they had accumulated a mass of rules touching every part of their lives,—about food and drink, about marriage, about the Sab-

bath and what could or could not be done upon it, about the tithing of anise and pepper-corns, about washings and the purification of dishes.

The Pharisees also taught a strict and benevolent morality: "Let thine house stand open in the streets, and let the poor be the children of thy house." "Speak little, do much, and receive all men with a friendly countenance." "Judge every man according to the scale of justice." "Judge not thy neighbor, till thou standest in his place." "Count thyself with the oppressed and not with the oppressors." "Listen to reviling words, and answer not again." "Do all from the love of God." And, summing up the law, "Do nothing to thy neighbor which is hateful to thyself." The Pharisees were strenuous believers in the doctrines of future rewards and punishments, and of the immortality of the soul, being opposed to the materialistic tendency of the times, and of the richer party of Sadducees.

The Pharisees were not men who professed the law, but were unwilling or afraid to do what the law bade. On the contrary, they were patriots and martyrs. When, not long after Jesus' death, an attempt was made to put up a heathen image in the temple, thousands of people threw

themselves before the governor, and cried, "We are willing to die." The war that led to the destruction of Jerusalem was essentially a religious war, which the Jews might have escaped if they had not been willing to die for what they held to be right. Such was the characteristic temper of the Pharisees, who constituted and guided public opinion for three hundred years. Not very numerous, forming an exclusive society of almost six thousand men, to which, however, the poorest Hebrew citizen might have access by fulfilling its strict conditions, the Pharisees were everywhere looked up to. They numbered among themselves, if not the most wealth, the best families in the land. In the synagogues of the country towns you would have seen their devout women among the most regular attendants and trustworthy supporters. The chief teachers were Pharisees, such as the renowned Hillel, whom Jesus may have seen when he came up as a boy to the temple, and his famous grandson, Gamaliel, Paul's teacher, perhaps the greatest man of Jesus' contemporaries. Paul himself was of a Pharisee family. Jesus was undoubtedly educated by Pharisee teachings in the synagogue at Nazareth.

Nicodemus is an excellent specimen of his

order. The common fashion of belittling his character is not warranted by the story, which makes him appear a rather superior man. How many of the upper class, deacons of rich churches with reputations to be talked about, or doctors of divinity, graduates of the university, can we count, who would go out of their way to look up an unlearned and humble teacher? How many well-to-do people are we sure of, who would recognize Jesus if he were to appear to-day? But Nicodemus skulked to Jesus' lodging under cover of night, some one says. How many, we ask, would have ventured to go at all, while as yet the rest of his very respectable party looked upon Jesus with extreme suspicion, when he was not an authorized teacher, when evil rumors came that he broke the laws and disregarded the Sabbath and consorted with low people? The story later on gives two further very creditable glimpses of Nicodemus. One is in the presence of the full Sanhedrim. They were excitedly discussing the dangerous and radical tendencies of Jesus' life and teachings. They honestly thought that Jesus was imperilling existing institutions. They had sent men to arrest him, who, being impressed with his teaching and the hold that he

had upon the people, returned without him. Then Nicodemus is said to have risen to demand justice for Jesus, reminding his angry associates that their law condemned no man without a hearing. Now, not one man out of ten has either the self-possession or the courage to stand thus alone against the crowd, not of another class, but the best men of his own class. The example of the American Congress, or any political convention, witnesses to this.

Once more, after the crucifixion, when most of the chosen disciples had run away, Nicodemus appears as one of the few who brought ointments, a hundred pounds' weight,—a very generous and costly gift. He came himself, the story goes: other rich men would have been content, if they did anything, to send their servants. Of course, such a man never voted for the crucifixion. Perhaps he would not be present where it seemed useless to raise his voice against the mad majority.

We have said enough to show that Nicodemus's character, if not of the highest type, was unusually high. We take him to represent nearly the best moral material that you see anywhere. His was a candid and truth-loving mind, willing to see

both sides of a question,—not a common thing in this world. He was not blindly prejudiced by the traditions of his order. As men go, he was remarkably appreciative,—a man of ideals, interested in the loftiest subjects, eager for religious illumination from any genuine source. You would have trusted Nicodemus as a fair judge and an honorable citizen. You would never have appealed in vain for the poor, for the support of the temple, for a subscription to help the Jews in Rome to build their new synagogue. We should be proud to have the like of Nicodemus, so earnest and cultured, come to live in our street, and glad to hear that so reputable and religious a man had taken seats in our church. We should like to have all the men in a Christian church as honest, trustworthy, conscientious, and benevolent as this Pharisee is represented to have been.

Nicodemus stands as the representative of the best that the Pharisees could produce. Why was it not enough? Give us a world of men as conscientious, earnest, and religious-minded as Nicodemus,—why would not this be a good enough world for any one? Level men up to Nicodemus's standard, and what is the use trying in this life to level men any higher? Wherein, then, do we find

Nicodemus unsatisfactory to our moral sense? "You must be born again," or from above, says Jesus, as tho he had said, "You have not begun yet to live." What is this lack in Nicodemus, that when we met him on the street, upon the level of common men, we had not felt, but which in the presence of Jesus we vaguely recognize? Nicodemus's lack was precisely what Jesus intimated. He had plenty of moral and spiritual capacity. He wanted moral and spiritual life. It is as when you see a fine log of oak. The log is splendid material for warmth and heat, but it needs the kindling touch of the fire. This is what Nicodemus did not possess. He neither blazed himself, nor was it in him to make any one else blaze. The man of the Pharisee type is cold and cautious, even in his charitable duties.

You cannot make a fire with a single log or coal, tho of the best. It will not ignite. You must put logs and coals together. So with men. There is a certain close contact of man with his brother man that we call "the sense of humanity." Men as individuals will not ignite. You must bring them into a certain kind of sympathetic relation together. Nicodemus stood outside of this new relation of brotherly humanity.

It is possible to give alms to the poor without touching the hands of the poor, like the prince who tosses coins to the crowd from his carriage. It is possible to do public service in such a spirit, as tho you were only serving yourself, without feeling the popular pulse. We send such men to our legislatures and to Congress, who perform their public service with no sense of a common humanity thrilling them and commanding allegiance. Nicodemus was the best of that kind of men.

Another thing. You must have the free air draw through your pile of logs to make a fire. That is, you must be disposed, in that relation of utter willingness and obedience, to let the divine will do what it may with you. What you are here for is to give heat and light. Let the air come, then, to the wood. Let the wood, being here on purpose to blaze, catch the flame and be fanned with the wind. But the Pharisee had covered his life over as with ashes, with deadening rites, conventions, observances, and rules, till you could hardly get at the real man with a breath of fresh air. Did the Pharisee ask, "How can I help my poor brothers?" No: he asked, "How much is it the custom to give, or what do the others give?"

Did he ask, "How can I make the most of the Sabbath?" Never! He asked instead, "What things must I refrain from doing, so as not to run any risks?" Did he ask, "How shall I come directly to the heart of the Eternal?" He did not see the Eternal at all; but he pored over the letter of sacred books as a miserable makeshift for seeing the face of God. The Pharisee did not think that the log was to burn and give heat and light: he did not think that all that life was for was to put log upon log and give the flame breathing space through them; but he thought that the logs were to be preserved as they were. He forgot that the stanchest oak logs, if you bury them, will go to decay.

The seamy side of Pharisaism explains itself. It was started as a system of Puritanism; but no system of Puritanism was ever started that did not run out at last into sham, self-complacency, hypocrisy, moral deadness, spiritual pride. Puritanism is an attempt to keep yourself intact, in some form or other to save your own souls, or, if you please, to have moral culture for yourselves and the families of people like you. As soon, however, as any virtuous set or congregation of people withdraw themselves from hearty

sympathy with other less virtuous or more ignorant people about them, the dry rot of self-complacency sets in to destroy them. Men were not meant to live, even in select communities any more than as individuals, apart from the others. There was never yet a man or a set of men who thought of their own superiority and prided themselves on their virtue or their religion over common men, who had heat or light enough to help other men to be warm or to see. It is as tho the oak log cried out, "See what good wood I am!" It does not warm you to say that. The only thing that you ask of the oak log is that it shall catch fire; and when it has caught fire, then and not till then will it have kindling power to make other wood less firm and solid blaze too.

The Pharisees, moreover, because they aimed to preserve everything as it was, were constitutionally timid. The system was constituted so as to prevent change or movement. "See," they said, "we have a high standard. We have attained it with difficulty. Any shock might tumble us to destruction." The Pharisees did not have any deep faith in their institutions or their religion. Men never have any real faith who are afraid that something may hurt the truth, so that

you must handle it carefully,—as tho a man were afraid that he would break his limbs if he stirred to use them !

The Pharisees believed, indeed, in a vague way, in the coming kingdom of God ; but they did little or nothing to bring it in. They merely waited, as tho it had nothing to do with men in this world. They were content to keep up their petty organization of six thousand families ; they were glad to make occasional wealthy proselytes from their Gentile neighbors ; but as for devoting their lives to make this world over into the kingdom of God, they did not catch the idea. That was what Jesus meant, when he told Nicodemus that he was like a man who had yet to be born in order to be alive. What was the well-to-do Nicodemus doing to make this a better world ? Was there any light and gladness where Nicodemus walked, such as a son of God ought to carry ? Did a spirit of joy and health go from him to kindle men's souls ? Were his courage and generosity contagious to seize other men by ? No : he was not awake. He had no spark of enthusiasm. His God was far off, not a living God here to-day. He touched men with no fine uplifting sense of the common humanity. A

thousand men as good as Nicodemus would not have saved Jerusalem, or banished its poverty, or lifted men out of their degrading vices. A dozen men, not nearly so good as Nicodemus, who nevertheless caught the fire of the Christ's love and the Christ's faith, could do more for the regeneration of the city than all the Pharisee sect. You feel this the moment that Jesus and Nicodemus meet. In Jesus' presence Nicodemus is a lay figure. It is not the stature of a well and real man. It is a sick man, no doubt with rugged constitution, who may be made well again, but who hardly stands up at all in comparison with Jesus' overflowing health and boundless life. Imagine the new possibilities that Jesus set before Nicodemus! Imagine what such a man as that might have risen to be and to do!

We have spoken with no reference to a mere historical retrospect. Nicodemus's story is the type of what is to-day in Boston or New York as truly as in Jerusalem. We have spoken idly, if we have not shown that the Pharisee type is here. Neither have we spoken in any disparagement of this type at its best. It is of the best moral fibre that we know. It takes Christ's name to

swear by. It takes the Christian ritual and ceremonies, and fine words to pray in. But no baptism or holy names or words make it Christian. The kindling baptism of "the Spirit of Christ," a vision of the Christ's ideal, the Christ-like love that offers all upon the altar of the divine humanity, the breath of the life of God on the soul, alone can redeem our modern Pharisaism and fill Nicodemus's being with joy and hope.

III.

NATHANAEL, THE PURE IN HEART.

GALILEE, Jesus' home, was the northern division of Palestine, being roughly two days' journey from Jerusalem through the intervening district of Samaria. It was more populous and fertile than Judea. In Jesus' time it was full of villages. The hillsides were terraced with gardens. Considerable towns — Capernaum, Tiberias, and others — were clustered about the lake. A varied commerce was carried up to Jerusalem and to Egypt, across the desert to Damascus, or over the ridge of the Lebanon range to the Tyrian coast, where you might have seen ships from the Nile, from Rome, from Tarsus, and from Athens. Large towns lay among the hills over the lake and the Jordan valley to the east. There were strong castles, palaces, race-courses, theatres,— the marks of a rich and pleasure-loving class. But most of the swarm-

ing population lived meagrely, being heavily taxed and oppressed. The Galilean people were a mixed race. There were towns of Greek names where you would have heard Greek commonly spoken. There were people, like Herod's family, from the old Edomite or Idumean tribes, the hereditary enemies of the Hebrews. There were Syro-Phœnicians from the coast, like the woman who came to Jesus to be healed. There were also villages where the Hebrews were the leading people. Cana, Nathanael's home, was one of these villages. No one knows precisely where the little village was,—probably within ten miles or an afternoon's walk from Nazareth. It was the same Cana where Jesus, early in his public life, attended a wedding. Indeed, there is an old tradition that Nathanael was the bridegroom on that occasion.

The moral condition of Galilee in Jesus' time is said to have been bad. The influx of foreigners with strange customs and foreign rites had been going on at least since Alexander the Great and his successors had overrun the country. Continual wars had wrought their natural demoralization. An unusual tide of luxury, upborne by the wearying toil of the multitudes, now lifted its un-

sightly waves. The wonder is how, in such times as these, with alluring vice in front and despair dogging men's steps behind, any virtue or faith survived. The fact is, however, that there seems never to have been a higher level of character or a more earnest and trustworthy people than you find throughout Palestine in this very period. The rise of John the Baptist and the ready hearing that he commanded, the high-minded men, such as Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and Gamaliel, the friends who almost everywhere await Jesus and rally to his side as disciples, the devout women who believe in him, glimpses of figures of the true-hearted, once seen, but hardly again,—the Roman centurion who had built a synagogue, the centurion who stood by the cross, the dying robber who out of his pain recognized Jesus,—these facts bespeak an undercurrent of wholesome vitality that no temptations could seduce nor despair and doubt kill; as when in the height of a fever, while the disease rages over the body, the skilled physician is aware of the little red globules in the blood, which, if they are vital enough and if they are not too few, will conquer the fever. Such are the vital germs in a party, in an army, in the supporters of every

good cause, often unseen, unthanked, wonderfully provided by God when the time comes, on the proper proportion of whom hangs success. Would to God it could be given to us to be counted by the Great Physician in that class of the saving life-germs, the true-hearted and sound, whom the fever, smoulder or burn as it may in the blood of the nation, cannot subdue!

They say that a naturalist, given one or two bones, will construct the creature to which they belonged, and, if you please, draw a rough picture of what he looked like. So out of two or three bare facts we can make out what kind of a man Nathanael was. We make him out, in the first place, to be a simple, ordinary man of the great middle class, with a bit of a plot of land outside the village, with a few olive-trees and grape-vines, and a little house built of mud or stones of the field in a narrow street of the town. We think of him as hardly older than Jesus,—thirty years more or less,—with a wife and little children, perhaps, in the tiny home in Cana. You would not have seen anything peculiar about him, as he drove his oxen in and out of the town gate, to distinguish him from other plain men. “Merely an average citizen,” you would

have said. But it is these average citizens, as we call them, of the great middle class that nearly everything good comes from. It is precisely in this class that you find most abundantly these vital germs of the national blood that we spoke of. These vital germs of the true-hearted do not, probably, flourish so well among the well-to-do, or prosperous class. They exist, but they are apt to be thinner, less vital, and fewer. There is some fatal tendency at work to kill them out, as tho they had a harder time to live. In the great revolution in England, in the days of Cromwell, and over and over in the history of our country, it was the men of the middle class, the mere average citizens, who not only gave the muscular force and the sinews of war, but the brains, the courage, the persistence, and the virtue,—yes, the men of mark to be leaders and statesmen. Nathanael came of what Nature calls her best stock,—of a noble mother, we may be sure; of pure, honest, faithful parentage. Who wants anything higher than that? Nathanael was one of the men who went to hear John the Baptist, and was doubtless baptized. Not that he specially needed to repent and lead a new life, but because, like Jesus, if baptism was good for

others, it was good for him to do whatever he wanted others to do.

It is a puzzle to know what any one committed to the old-fashioned doctrine of total depravity would make of what Jesus says of Nathanael,—“an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.” Jesus had barely seen Nathanael. The latter did not know Jesus at all or that he had ever seen him. He was suspicious of the Nazareth people, who had no great reputation. But Jesus instinctively recognized him at once as *his* kind of man.

Jesus' theory of human nature was quite different from that of the theologies. He held no doctrine whatever that men are all born corrupt, as tho a physician were to teach, because he finds average men out of health, that men were all born with disease in their blood. But Jesus held, as the analogy is everywhere else, that some men at least are born well, with health in their veins. He took Nathanael to be such a man,—a really healthy, simple, sound, moral nature; in short, one of the people whom we think of as naturally good. We think of him as growing up in the midst of a corrupt population, where a boy saw and heard all manner of profane, vulgar, and

vicious things ; but he had no affinity for such things. His natural tastes and sympathies were clean, and whatever was not clean did not cleave to him. We think of him growing up in the midst of a trading community, where a boy saw and heard of the tricks of the trade. He heard it said that a man could not succeed and be honest ; but it was not a temptation for Nathanael to go into any business where a man was expected to lie. At the same time we do not think of Nathanael as any less a thorough boy. We think of him as no timid or cowardly youth, but outspoken and fearless. It did not occur to him, however, that he was doing anything else than what was his nature. His wonder would have been that boys or men could bear to soil their hands or their souls, when any one was so vastly happier to be clean. His wonder would have been that men could bear to be stingy, when it was so vastly pleasanter to be obliging ; that men could be foolish and quarrel instead of the easier thing, being good-tempered ; that men could hate each other, when so much wretchedness wanted to be borne with and cured. We think of Nathanael as a man whom others came to for help and advice, perfectly trustworthy,

whom you would have left your treasures with if you went on a journey, or appointed in your will to be executor and guardian.

One is reminded of the life of Abraham Lincoln. He bore some of the marks of his rude frontier life. Nevertheless, without being as faultless as some smaller gems of his type, he strikes one as the type of man like Nathanael, being essentially a large, generous, well-born, wholesome nature. It was no temptation to Lincoln to take more than belonged to him, to ask great fees, to think of his salary instead of his work. It would have been as unnatural for such a man to accept bribes as it is unnatural for the mastiff to betray his master. What a confidence we have in such a man in those respects in which his goodness is simply his nature! There is no danger or strain of temptation in those respects. The man cannot be made to take what is not his, to tell a lie, to desert his friends, to disappoint love, or to give up a cause. It is as tho you had your road-bed laid on one of Nature's causeways, bedded in the granite rock, beyond the risk of accident. Thank God that he makes such men, who do not have to struggle to be good, being born of a large pattern! How we admire them!

How beautiful their simple, natural superiority seems to us ordinary people, born with mixed nature, with doubtful tendencies; born with sad streaks of meanness or timidity, with our sight not perfectly true, with baser passions, with instincts that catch hold of the good, but also with lower animal instincts to which evil things cling. Yes; and who, when we do what is right, are apt to plume ourselves on it, as tho it were anything out of the common for a man to do right. And then we see one of these Nature's noblemen, sincere, unaffected, simple-hearted, who does "good as the bees make honey," because it is man's true nature to do good. We are ashamed that we should ever think what we do extraordinary, as tho a soldier were to think it extraordinary that he does not run away, or an engineer were to ask praise for running his engine.

We said that there is every analogy why Nature should produce men born to goodness, for she gives us men born to everything else. She gives us men born to visions of art, natural geniuses. She gives to some a native power of memory. She gives born athletes. She gives us born mathematicians like Colburn and musicians like Beethoven. She raises men up to whom it is

natural to think and study, to ask questions and find answers. Why should she not give us men and women born with pure thoughts, with native generosity, with instinctive virtue and justice, with courage, with large, quick sympathies, who would rather serve than be served? Nature undoubtedly does this. "O heart of man naturally Christian!" says one of the old writers.

The truth is, this native goodness sets the standard of what a man ought to be. Nathanael's type is not an exceptional type, but it is the normal type, such as every man ought to conform to; as tho, when Nature produced a perfectly shaped and healthy human body, she were to say: "See! That is my pattern for all human bodies. Model by that. Call that the rule, and call all the bodies that fail of the standard misshapen or diseased."

Men see the great athlete go by, and hundreds of youths set to work to make their bodies like his. They are ashamed of puny limbs and limp muscles. Men see the natural scholar,—an Agassiz, for example,—and a whole university is stirred to build ordinary minds up to the model of what a clear, vitalized, well-equipped mind should be. So when men see the normal type of a Nathanael,

—frank, thoroughly open, pure in heart. There is the mark of what every man ought to be. You cannot bear to be sordid and greedy in such a presence. All about Nathanael there is a process of levelling upward, precisely as when boys live on the same street with the athlete.

We see the difference now between Nathanael and Nicodemus. We respected Nicodemus, and had to pronounce him, as men go, an unusually satisfactory man; but he strikes us as an artificial man, not simple and natural like the stalwart villager, who, as seems probable, had never even joined the Pharisee sect, and most likely found their ceremonies and rules irksome. Nicodemus, we take it, would have given liberally to the new synagogue, but he would have wanted to know first what the others gave. He would have gone to call on Jesus, preferring to go under cover of night; but Nathanael would have given his heart with his money. It would hardly have occurred to Nathanael that he was taking a risk, to do what was right or to stand by his friend. Nathanael did not even know that his life was precious.

There is a possible sense of discouragement to us ordinary people at the sight of pure natural goodness, as the ordinary scholar sometimes

despairs at the sight of the men who seem to learn without effort. We have certain compensations, however. In the first place, the ordinary scholar, even if he cannot attain to the ease of the other, can succeed in doing everything that the other does. As while you would prefer Nature's solid road-bed for your track, yet, if you choose, you can make a road-bed of your own over the bogs or across the ravine. You can make it solid above risk of its giving way. There is nothing that art, skill, cost, patience, may not do for your ordinary nature. You have known men, observing the laws, build up weak bodies into splendid athletic condition. You have known common scholars to outrun the natural scholars. So you have known faulty, seamy natures built up into moral vigor and elasticity. The fact is that Nature works to help us, and not the other way. Nature is always saying to the feeble and imperfect thing, Try to live ; try to grow ; move up to the standard. Her currents of life wait to flow through you as soon as you obey. For the difference between one man and another is not so much a difference in nature, as tho there were different varieties of men,—for there is only one common nature,—but the difference is, as it

were, in nutrition ; that is, in the vitalizing of the nature, one man being more alive than the other. "Be more alive," Nature says, "and I will make you strong."

Besides, the element of self-consciousness is not altogether evil when once it is restrained to modesty. There is a sense of satisfaction and enjoyment in supplementing Nature, as of the engineer who enjoys building the somewhat difficult bridge more than laying the ordinary roadway. Nathanael, who did not feel our temptations, had not the joy in resisting that we may feel who have honestly built up our trestle-work to the point where we stand secure under the throb of the passing train ; as the man who has always lived on the hills is not so happy as he who has lived in the smoky air below, and then comes to the hills ; as certainly no one enjoys health more than he who has conquered it out of the teeth of disease.

So with moral health, man's only normal state. We may well be filled with shame not to possess it. We may see the ridiculousness and pitiableness of harboring pride or superiority over men who have less health than we, as tho one convalescent should look down on others or despise

the sick ; but we have a righteous sense of joy, thankfulness, and ecstasy that we are at last on the highway of health. Even Nathanael, who had never needed a physician or knew what sickness was, might not be so glad ; and he might be no more modest than we are, who know what it is to have been morally weak, and now catch the perfectly delightful hope of being strong and well, as the children of God.

IV.

PETER AND JOHN THE DISCIPLES.

JESUS' friends are often thought of as poor people. But they did not belong to the class to whom you have to give alms. They were merely poor as the average citizen of Galilee was poor. There was leisure for gossip, for lessons in the synagogue, for a holiday to hear a new prophet on the Jordan. We do not believe that they had to work so hard or so many hours a day as the poor work among us. Indeed, poverty was not so dreadful an enemy in the mild climate of Palestine as it is in the vast Christian cities of England and America, where cold adds its terrors. Among Jesus' disciples were two pairs of brothers from Bethsaida, one of the fishing villages on the shore of the lake of Tiberias. Tiberias was a little fresh-water lake, about fifteen miles long and six wide, through which flowed the Jordan River. Here was the scene of most

of Jesus' public work. Here, where the caravan road left the lake at Capernaum, was Jesus' favorite resting place. Near by was the beautiful plain of Gennesaret, with its almost tropical growth of fruits. Across the lake to the east were bare, precipitous hills, where Jesus found solitude. You could climb from the level of the lake to the mountains upon the west and north, and perhaps see on the blue of the Mediterranean the packets that passed from Tyre to Joppa, Cæsarea, or Alexandria. The fish of the lake of Tiberias were well-known articles of commerce, being salted and exported. Considerable numbers of families with their hired men were supported by the business. Their fishing boats dotted the surface of the lake.

One of the stories is that Jesus made the acquaintance of the young fishermen by the Jordan, where they had gone to hear John the Baptist. It would seem by another account that he found them at their work,—according to one Gospel, fishing; by another, cleaning their nets by the sea. Luke says that Jesus, being pressed by the crowd, asked permission of Simon to use his boat from which to speak the better to the people thronging the shore. Of Jesus' twelve apostles,

strangely little is known; in the case of Simon the Cananean, Thaddeus, and Bartholomew, hardly more than the bare mention of the name. The two pairs of brothers, James and John, Peter and Andrew, stand closest to Jesus, tho neither James nor Andrew has any well-defined identity apart from the better known brothers, John and Peter. These two appear almost inseparable from Jesus. He is more affectionately attached to them than the others. He takes them and James into his privacy, as in the garden of Gethsemane. Knowing them, you know what the best of the disciples were.

It was not uncommon in Judea for a teacher to gather about himself a little company of attached followers. This had been the case with John the Baptist, whose devoted friends followed him to the fortress where he gave up his life. The claims of personal friendship and discipleship overrode even the claims of the family, much more the interests of a man's business.

Peter, and it would seem John also, were young married men, and were partners in the fishery. They gave up their trade and left their homes to follow Jesus. To understand how Jesus could have found men willing for his sake to relinquish

everything, one must remember the extraordinary expectations with which people's minds were filled. The end of the old world was drawing near. The pain, the poverty, the misfortune, the national disgrace, the wicked oppression, would cease. There would be a new king. Justice would at last be done. If there was as much as a chance that these startling events were at hand, what was the fishing business by the lake that it should bind a man down to turn his life into shekels when soon life and death would be at issue? The disciples could hardly have made up their minds at once that Jesus, a Nazareth man, was the Prince whom people looked for; but there was that in Jesus' bearing and manner of teaching — he was so sincere, disinterested, and authoritative — that when he said, "Come," it seemed wrong not to come. Do you not know that there are men with a quality of power, insight, and dignity that it is hard to refuse? Do they ask help, we give it to them. Do they ask money, we are stirred to contribute. Do they ask people's lives, as such men did ask lives in the great Civil War, men are moved to volunteer. So with Jesus' royal personality, whom humble men instinctively obeyed, from which the rich young ruler, when he had refused, turned away sorrowful.

We do not understand that we have in Peter and John any exceptional quality of men, that they so readily became Jesus' disciples. On the contrary, all that we find about the twelve convinces us that they stand as types of average men of decidedly common moral character. They were dull men, extremely slow to comprehend their Master's teaching, wanting to have even parables explained. They were superficial, with an eye for outward success, numbers, crowds, popularity. They were narrow and ungenerous. They did not like it that some one not of their own number should be healing in Jesus' name. They would have liked to call fire down on a Samaritan village that did not receive them. They were jealous of each other and quarrelsome. James and John appear scheming to secure the promise of the prime minister's place in the new kingdom. What shall we get, says Peter, to pay us for leaving all? It is the same men who haggled over the price of their fish at the lake, envious if another boat had better luck. Whatever you make of the story of Peter trying to walk on the sea, it stands as a reminiscence of the conceit of a small, self-confident nature. Another familiar story exhibits something in

Peter of a spirit of worldliness more offensive and greedy, we suspect, than the mere words convey, that provokes Jesus to turn on him and say, "Get thee behind me, Satan." People often speak of Thomas as the type of the sceptic, but it is not the truth-loving sceptic, the earnest inquirer: it is only the common, stupid sceptic, who doubts as easily as he believes. One of the twelve was Judas,—a man, we suspect, money-loving, weak, and over-shrewd rather than bad. Remembering his piteous remorse and bitter death, we cannot think of him as much worse by nature than the eleven, who to a man ran away in the hour of their Master's distress, as the best of them could not keep awake through the time of his anguish; and then, in the trial, Peter, the boaster, who had said that he would never desert his Lord, steals in to look on, and before Jesus' face denies that he knew him, while a few hours later it is left to Joseph and Nicodemus and a few women to care for the Master's body. To the date of the crucifixion there is next to nothing told of these disciples, except the fact that they were disciples, to stir our admiration or respect. There is not one of them that shows the moral fibre of Nicodemus. There is not a

particle of evidence that there is a Nathanael among them. If Peter and John had had honor and lands and position, think you, were they the men to sacrifice all for Jesus? They do not impress us so. It was comparatively easy and safe to follow Jesus, or they would not have done it.

It is not, of course, strange that Jesus should have loved poor and humble men, for there are poor men — Nathanael, for example — who are extraordinary in character; but these men were ordinary in character, cowardly, untruthful, jealous, selfish, narrow-minded, the very kind of men whom you would suppose Jesus would find it impossible to bear and associate with. Any one of our American congregations ought, you say, to produce in a moment twelve better men to make apostles out of, that could be depended on, of more insight and moral elevation, of large chivalry, who would have died with Jesus. And yet Jesus loved these ordinary men. What did he find in them to love, or to think that he could make into the quality of apostles? It is as tho to the unpractised eye there were shown specimens of gold-bearing earth or rock. The unpractised eye, expecting to see nuggets of pure gold, is disappointed at this mere ordinary-look-

ing earth or rock. But the miner knows its value. "See," he says, "there are grains of gold in that earth, there are veins in the rock. It is extremely precious," the practised miner says. His imagination leaps forward and sees the great bars of pure gold that by and by, after the washing and the crucible, will be made out of this very ordinary seeming earth. So with this ordinary human nature. Looked at roughly, you do not see anything noble in it. The world scoffs at it. We do not want to see this common sand. "Give us nuggets and bars and the clear-cut coin from the mint," says the voice of the world. "Nay," says the Christ, "give us this ordinary human nature, with the gleam of the gold of God that shines in it. What does it matter that it has dross and alloy, since the precious value is in it besides?"

Jesus' teaching is never that human nature is ruined and worthless; on the contrary, human nature is lovable. Jesus is always spying out something genuine in men. Making allowances for bad defects and a good deal of selfishness, Jesus knew that the disciples had a spirit of honest loyalty. Their nature was mixed; but it was not altogether for themselves that these men

had left their business and homes, and risked all to follow him. Stupid as they were in appreciating their Master, they believed in him and loved him. They really meant it when they promised to die with him. Their impulses and feelings, tho so far only emotional, at times rose to the level of heroism. These rude men had also a glimmering sense of ideals. It was because Jesus' character towered above them that they revered him. They were men of patriotic mould, who caught visions of the new Israel that was to be. Without clear insight of religion, they had religious aspirations. Above all, they had a sense of duty. They meant to do right. You could appeal not in vain to their consciences. You could even rebuke them, and they would bear it, knowing that it was for their good. They had the excellent quality of persistence, or holding out. They had been tested in all these respects. Other men had also enrolled themselves as Jesus' disciples, and had become tired or discouraged, and had given him up; but the twelve had held on. No mere adventurers or time-servers or self-seekers would have stayed with Jesus. The disciples' qualities of faithfulness, loyalty to a leader, personal affection, religious

aspiration, patriotism, conscience, obedience to ideals,—you are almost tempted to call these rare qualities. In the form of the pure, refined nugget of gold they are rare; but mixed in the dross and alloy they are very frequent, being qualities of average human nature. They are the qualities of the great middle class,—we mean middle class not in means, but in morals, who are neither rich nor poor in moral character. Altogether below them are the poor, the only really poor in this world, in whom these average qualities, the gleams of the divine gold, are scant and thin, lost in the bulk of the dross. God pity the morally poor, the sad unfortunates who seem not to have it in them to be faithful, in whom stir no aspirations for holy and beautiful things, who do not even admire the Christ when they see him! These only are poor. Be sure God does pity them. Be sure, wherever one grain of the true gold is hidden, there is love enough in the universe to redeem it. This divine gold has a magic affinity to find its like and to gather every particle to itself.

We liken Jesus to a soldier who has mustered in a company of recruits. It is not necessary that these be picked men, ready to make officers of;

it is not necessary that they should have had experience in drilling or in the field, or that they should be stronger or braver than common. All that is necessary is that they shall be average men, of ordinary qualities of strength, endurance, intelligence, courage, and morals. They must not have the average lowered by shirks and bounty-jumpers. The trained soldier who enlisted these men foresees that they will be awkward, that they will be homesick and weary and sometimes wish that they had not come, that they are liable to panic and rout. But he also foreknows, so be he has average material, that he will weld these men into thorough soldiers, hardy, fearless, and patient, who will march to the cannon's mouth at a word, who will die together, if need be, like Washington's veterans at Valley Forge. So Jesus took the average human nature such as he could get. If he could not do his work with such stuff as common men are made of, if his principles would not serve average human nature, if his truths were only good for saints and philosophers, they were not good for this world at all. "Give me average men," Jesus said, "and I will make my invincible soldiers before whom the kingdom of evil will fall."

There is one quality which makes disciples which we have so far omitted. It is docility, or willingness. Jesus could not have done anything without it. As we have seen, there was moral material to be had considerably better than Jesus found in his disciples; precisely as, when a recruiting agent went into a town in the time of the war, there would be the material for soldiers left in the town after he had gone away better than much which he took. There would be men of splendid natural capacity, who did not sympathize with the war or who were too busy with their private affairs. What distinguishes the recruits is that *they have enlisted*, whereas perhaps better men stay at home. They have committed themselves to obey orders and do a soldier's work. So Jesus' disciples, being ordinary men in other respects, were different from other ordinary men or even better men by nature, in that they had committed themselves, while they were with Jesus, to be taught and to obey.

This is where the great mistake is made about what it is to be a Christian. There is nowhere a hint that a Christian pretends to be better than other men. He often is not naturally so good. Much less is there a hint that he professes to be

perfect. He is simply an enlisted man. He is pledged to a certain ideal of life, to be a learner. Show him what the Christ bids, he will at least move toward doing it. Show him what the will of God is, and he will try to accept it. Show him what the spirit of the Christ is, it is what he wants to exhibit. Duty says, "Storm the fort": the enlisted man will try, tho he may lay down his life in the breach outside; or, if sudden panic seizes him, he may be depended on, at the voice of his captain, to rally to the colors again. This definition of Christianity is the same essentially, whether we take the modern and even radical interpretation or the old-fashioned interpretation. Whatever is right, the Christian is pledged to try to do it. What is true, the Christian is pledged to try honestly to find out. What ought to be, the Christian is enlisted to make that real.

It is easy to see why Jesus made so much of discipleship. The need in the war was soldiers, enlisted men. It was idle merely to say that you sympathized with the national cause while you were spending your time in making money for yourself. It was idle to show that you had the courage and physique for a soldier, unless some-

how you co-operated to help the soldier's cause. Indeed, there is a certain deterioration in qualities, however excellent, unless they are put out to discipline. "I have an ear for music and a natural voice," some one says, "and I will not take a master." It is almost certain that that fine natural voice goes to waste or ruin. "I have not much voice," some one else modestly says, "but I will take the best master there is. I will bear his criticism. I will practise his rules." Presently, this common voice grows clear and sweet and strong. For Nature is against all self-complacency: Nature is always pushing men to take masters and get discipline,—that is, discipleship. Nature urges us all to obey rules. "Obey rules, or you perish," she says. Nature is always organizing men to work together, to join the school or university, to enlist and co-operate, to obey orders.

The man who enlisted rose from the ranks and came home a hero. The man who stayed at home to take care of himself died, and no one cared for his loss. So with the disciples. The noble young man in the story would not enlist, and no one ever hears of him again. But Peter and the rest, rustics and fishermen, rose from the ranks to apostleship, martyrdom, and immortality.

The same happens daily. The youth of to-day vows the eternal old vow of the Christ: "Show me the right, and, so help me God, I will do it." So all the world's heroes come. Failing that vow, men's lives run out into ignominy.

One thing more. We have left a whole half of the disciples' lives untouched. Something happened to them after a while,—except to poor Judas, who fell out and lost himself. The scholars who plodded over the dusty routine came at last to a point where they caught the secret of the Master. They could do what he did. They had got out of the fogs about the base of the mountain; and, as the whole wonderful prospect that he had told them of burst upon them, they became new men and masters, too. The very men who had run away from the Roman spears, raised to a new power, braved crucifixion themselves. Their selfishness, purged away, left the sterling gold of love. Their faith became invincible. So much for what Jesus could do with average men. "It is not essential," Jesus said, "to purchase choice oak to build the fire." The world can be warmed and lighted without the superior quality of Nicodemus and the Pharisee sect. Bring on mere average wood and pile it on the hearth. That

was discipleship; namely, the willingness to give one's self up for the world's heat and light. But, while the superior oak piled by itself neither warmed nor lighted a soul, this mere average wood,—yes, with crooked sticks and inferior fibre, that yet gave itself to the service of the great household,—catching at last the holy flame of Christ, blazed and burned and shone, and the world thanked God and blessed it till the cold oak itself began to catch the heat.

V.

JESUS, THE MASTER.

JESUS' town of Nazareth was small and unimportant. It is not mentioned in the Old Testament ; and, except for the Gospels, its name would never have been preserved. It was about twenty miles from the Lake of Tiberias on the east and the Mediterranean on the west. Rounded limestone hills, four or five hundred feet high, rise above the valley where the town lies. From one of these hills you can see the Mediterranean and Mount Carmel and the great plain of Galilee,—the scene of many a battle,—the Samaritan hills beyond, and Mount Hermon, always snow-covered, more than fifty miles to the north. Jerusalem lay beyond the Samaritan country about seventy miles, or three days' journey. The coasts of Tyre and Sidon under the shadow of Mount Lebanon were less than three days' journey in the opposite direction. Between these limits,

north and south about the length of Massachusetts, and east and west from the Mediterranean to the country across the Jordan, about the width of Massachusetts, was comprised probably all that Jesus ever saw of the world we live in. Entering the gate of Nazareth, you would have seen narrow streets, with low houses, each built around a court-yard where the domestic animals could be driven at night or in war. The plain building of the synagogue would have perhaps been the most conspicuous object. The inhabitants of the town were small farmers and tradespeople. They spoke in the somewhat harsh Galilean dialect, by which a citizen of Jerusalem would have detected a native of the country. The Nazareth people had no reputation which would have led any one to expect a rabbi or prophet among them. On the contrary, they appear in the narrative of the Gospels to have been specially narrow-minded and fanatical. It was at Nazareth, Jesus' home, where they would have taken his life. In this obscure Jewish village, Jesus grew up, the eldest son, as it appears, of a considerable family, to the uneventful life of a carpenter.

Let us see the reading and education which he had. Besides the books that make the Old Testa-

ment and the Apocrypha, one might have found in Nazareth the so-called "Book of Enoch," the "Psalms of Solomon," and a few other manuscripts, such as fed the popular Messianic expectations. Of nearly all other books, especially of Greek or Latin literature, Jesus would have known nothing. Of the science of nature, he gleaned only what the watchful observer discovered for himself of the flight of the sparrow or the lilies of the valley. Of the life of the great, of the world's politics, of the vast power beyond the sea in Italy, whose legions passed by to fight the Parthians on the frontier, of her famous system of laws, this young Galilean could have had only the most meagre intelligence.

Jesus lived at Nazareth, it would seem, till he was thirty years old. People thought of him as the *cárpenter* or the carpenter's son. So humble had his life been up to this time that Nathanael, a citizen of Cana, only two hours' walk from Nazareth, seems not to have heard of him. What had he been doing these thirty years? What had he been silently thinking about? What marvellous secret had he caught, that he should suddenly appear with the strange figure of John the Baptist at the Jordan,—that, when John's life

was quenched, Jesus should take his place, with John's boldness, but with a new and original ease, dignity, and authoritativeness? It is not certain that Jesus' public life lasted more than a year. Suppose it was three years. It ended in ignominy; and yet Jesus' career marks an epoch in the history of the world. Wherein does this uniqueness of Jesus consist? What had he to contribute that the world needed or that other men did not have?

Was he unique in the wonderful things which he did, in certain supernatural powers of which the world has made great account? But just such wonderful things are told of others. Substantially, everything that the world has accounted marvellous in the story of Jesus is to be found in the stories of Elijah and Elisha, even to the raising of the dead; but the world is hardly interested in Elijah and Elisha. In fact, people do not believe in Jesus to-day as they once did, because he is reported to have worked miracles; but, when they believe the miracles, it is because they first believe in Jesus. Was Jesus unique, then, in the new truths which he brought? We can hardly find a single teaching of Jesus that has not its counterpart in the words of earlier men. His most

beautiful law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," he only quotes. The belief in immortality, associated with him, was perhaps as general among the Jews of Jesus' time as it is to-day.

The story also was of other sinless men,— Enoch, for example. There had been blameless men, friends of God and prophets, in whom the world has seen no fault. Jesus himself had praised Nathanael as such a blameless man. Neither did Jesus seem directly to accomplish anything. The marvel is to account for such results as we see to-day in his name, with only a year or two of the preaching of one who did not strive nor lift up his voice in the streets. Yet we all feel the fact of Jesus' uniqueness. When we praised the noble and austere character of John the Baptist, we felt a lack in him as soon as Jesus appeared. When we were about to praise Nicodemus, the picked man of the Puritan or Pharisee sect, the appearance of Jesus dwarfed Nicodemus. When we found Nathanael, a man of pure natural goodness, there was that in Jesus which marked him as a distinctly higher type.

It is as well to acknowledge that there are some things which you cannot explain. What was it in Jenny Lind's voice that entranced her generation?

It was a human voice, not an angel's. She sang the same old notes that others had sung. She invented nothing ; but her name is immortal in the annals of song. Girls to-day live in the hope of doing what Jenny Lind did. The fact is, God's world is full of such surprises. Flavors, fragrances, harmonies, or proportions, a beautiful face, a sweet voice, the works of genius, the common daily fact of love, the aspirations of faith, man's hope of immortality,—all touch upon mystery that no science can more than name. So of Jesus' life.

Jesus' characteristic ideas are perfectly familiar. He held, first of all, that God was the most real fact in the universe. No one was so near as God. His presence simply wrapped you around. Your spirit only had life through the breathing of the spirit of God revealed in every sky and star. Of power, truth, or thought, you are only a channel or vehicle to carry and transmit. The one fact of God explains and unifies everything. Man has nothing that belongs to him exclusively. His life is simply to do whatever the divine will bids. According to Jesus, the law that bound all was love. Love was the highest thing. Love was the life of the great Father of all, and, by conse-

quence, of his children. Trust the dictates of love, then, wherever it led you. Follow it, though it bade sacrifice and martyrdom. Giving up all for love's sake, losing life if you must, yet keeping love, you kept the life of God.

There are certain striking and memorable passages that always convey these ideas,—the beatitudes, for example, and especially the words: "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God"; "Love your enemies"; "For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good"; "It is more blessed to give than to receive"; "God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." Jesus found men everywhere selfish; that is, seeking first to save their own lives. He saw that the secret of life was the opposite. For this was a universe in which God reigned. He, then, who would give his life to serve God—*i.e.*, to speak the truths and do the deeds of God—should find life; precisely as each little cell of the vine finds its own life by passing onward the life of the vine, not by stopping and clogging its flow. What makes the whole vine grow will make every branch grow. First, then, serve the life of the whole, and the whole will take care of

you, its parts. Thus Jesus said, speaking out of his experience, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me."

These ideas traverse the New Testament; but they are all found in the Old Testament, not to speak of other scriptures. Characteristic as they were of Jesus, he had not altogether cleared them (as no man of his age could have cleared them) of the prevailing superstitions of the time, in which every Jewish child was brought up. Nevertheless, Jesus did what others had only partially done or talked of doing. He put his ideas into practice, and did not simply contemplate them, like the Pharisees. He lived as though the good God was real. He did not say that matter was evil, like the Essenes; but he consistently enjoyed God's beautiful world. He held his life as not his own. He treated men as brethren, loved them as himself, gave himself utterly to the service of the great brotherhood. What God showed as true, he spoke without fear. What God showed to be right, he actually did. He tried to bring about the ideal kingdom of peace which others had dreamed of. He said to men,—if not in so many words, yet substantially,—“Let us join hands together, and make the good times real.”

All this was new. The prophets and John the Baptist had been as fearless as Jesus, perhaps as obedient; but they had spoken of God's world as yet to come. Jesus said that God's world was here already. It was a new attitude,—easy, unconstrained, and gladsome. There had been in all ages quiet instances of peace-loving, just, and guileless souls like Nathanael; but it had not occurred to them to do anything more than to live their pure lives. The temptation was to get away from the sinners; but Jesus held that his life belonged to the sinners. He lived for the sake of bringing about a change in the social order, so that men should cease to be sinners. That was what he made disciples for. There was nothing morbid, ascetic, or gloomy in this man, with whom God was now present, who lived above the fear of death, who stood for the coming age of gold.

In the famous battle above the clouds at Chattanooga, while men fought uncertainly in the mist below, the advance guard of the attacking force climbed high enough to seize the higher lines in the enemy's rear. The battle was not yet finished. The advance guard would yet have to lay down their lives; but, if that higher point

were won, the cause was assured. So with Jesus' conquest of evil. Down in the mists below, the prophets and ascetics had fought a doubtful battle with evil on its own level. But Jesus had gained a vantage-ground, from which the nature of the conflict was altered. Let men once seize this elevation, and there would hardly need to be any more waste of life. One man here was better than a hundred fighting on the level below. What could not twelve, or a company of true men, do from this higher vantage-ground, where already the very sight of the sacred flag of brotherly love put the evil forces to flight?

Jesus' method or secret has become a sort of proverb. It is not enough that you have in a family, a community, a parliament, average, well-intentioned men like Peter and John. They will be voted down, or persuaded to evil, or craftily bought. It is not enough that you have quiet, patient men like Nathanael, here and there one, who cannot be persuaded or purchased. It is not enough that you have the stern voice of a prophet denouncing evil. But give us one man of utter disinterestedness, who pities the guilty while he loves the oppressed,—committed body and soul to serve the whole family or the whole nation,—

who treats everything from the point of view of love, and such a man becomes an invincible leader.

Another thing. Men had been used to go by laws and rules, as they mostly go now. You could hold on to your technical private rights. You could be ungenerous ; you could act in distrust toward your neighbor ; you could cut off your disobedient child with a shilling ; you could be hard, unforgiving, and proud ; you could insist upon the exact terms of the contract. Jesus swept all these excuses away, when he asked of each and all, "How about your spirit?" "Was your act or word in the right spirit?" It is a new standard when any one recognizes this ideal of the right spirit. How our egotism wriggles and twists to get away from the kindly hold of that sort of conviction! "But," our egotism says, "it was the law, and I ought to have my rights, and the other had injured me"; or "I only did as others." And then we lift up our eyes and catch the wonderful standard, so subtle and yet so imperative,—the spirit of Christ.

The steel needle, so far as it is only of steel, will not point true to the north. It will point wherever you lay it down. Magnetize the steel,

if you want it to point to the north. So men's lives, so far only as they are of good material, will not necessarily hold true to the life of God. But Jesus' life was magnetized and possessed. The life and forces of God played through it. It gave itself utterly to their motion. Whither the spirit pointed, there it went. It is not merely the goodness of the excellent material that the world wants. It wants vitalized goodness. It wants men like Jesus alive and awake in every city, village, and household. It wants not merely kindly-intentioned people, but people magnetized to a purpose, vitalized with love, committed to the Christ's kind of life.

Here is the secret of all unity among men. Vitalize men with the spirit of Christ, and such men will think and act together. The magnetized material points the same way. *What does the voice of God bid us do for the love of man?* Christ's way is the way that every soul asking this question instinctively takes. In the hour that I ask this question, I join hands with the true and noble of all lands and ages. In the hour that we ask this question together, we are as one man in our sympathy, we have a common worship.

We wondered how Jesus without any education, such as men count education, could have printed his name on the most civilized nations forever. One of his marvellous sentences carries his secret. "If thine eye be single," he says, "thy whole body shall be full of light." It is the quality of learning, the seeing from the level of the hilltop, that makes any one wise. To the single eye of love, mysteries and enigmas are disclosed, the lines of human strife are straightened, the simple conditions of right and wrong are made clear. Did you never try to answer your baffling questions with this quality of sight? Did you never cease to ask, What is expedient? or What is wise? and ask instead, What does brotherly love bid? or, How would I like to be served?

Finally, what gives our ordinary lives inspiration and comfort? Jesus' vitalized goodness, we answer, goes by contagion, as the flame kindles in the dry fuel. Like the old story of the beacon-fires that blazed from burning Troy, from headland to headland about the Ægean Sea carrying good tidings to ten thousand homes, so the fire of the Christ's light plays and kindles from century to century through history till it bursts out in a million homes. When do we see one soul

caught by this flame, when does one thoroughly pure and vitalized life touch us with its warmth, when do we ever draw together and take for an hour the motion of the spirit of God that leaps to seize us, that we do not have revealed what it would be to give our lives wholly up, Christ-fashion, to the beautiful will of God? For the type of Jesus is the coming type of the true man everywhere,—a living, vitalized man, a just, friendly, brotherly man, of wide, quick sympathies, of incandescent faith and hope. Take our lives then, Spirit of the living God, make them thine own! Show us what is Christ-like, we will try to do it. Show us the visions of the kingdom of God, we will live to make them real. We commit ourselves to thee, to be taught and to obey.

In the love of truth and in the spirit of Jesus Christ, we join for the worship of God and the service of man.

We believe in one God, the Father eternal, whose righteousness, wisdom, and love rule the worlds.

We believe in the holy spirit of cheerfulness, charity, and peace, which we would win and maintain.

We believe in truthfulness, honesty of conduct, integrity of character, wise and generous giving, purity of thought and life.

We believe that we owe our lives to the service of our kindred, our neighbors, the state, and mankind.

We believe that obedience to duty is the way of life, and no one can do wrong and not suffer harm.

We believe that no real harm can befall the righteous in life or death.

We believe in the imitation of Jesus Christ, and all God's heroes, teachers, martyrs, saints, and benefactors.

We hold to the brotherhood of those who love and serve man, and we hope for the Life Everlasting.

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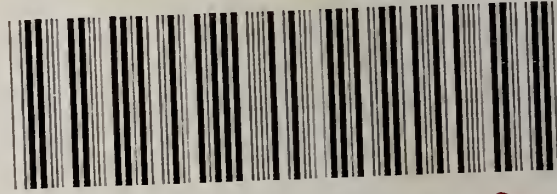
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